

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**West Hills Middle School
8270 South Grizzly Road (5290 West)
West Jordan, Utah 84088**

January 6-7, 2004



Utah State Office of Education
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**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**West Hills Middle School
8270 South Grizzly Road (5290 West)
West Jordan, Utah 84088**

January 6-7, 2004

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF
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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, January 6-7, 2004, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of West Hills Middle School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Catherine Jensen is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for West Hills Middle School students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of West Hills Middle School.

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10/30/03

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Dennis Johnson	Director, Planning & Student Services
Rich Field	Director, Purchasing
Beth Usui	Director, Special Education
James Hinckle	Director, Transportation

WEST HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Catherine Jensen Principal
Katherine Riding Assistant Principal
Mark Whitaker Assistant Principal

Counseling

Christen Richards-Khong Counselor
Chandra Walker Counselor
Randy Tree Counselor
Janet Ford Guidance

Support Staff

Roxane Siggard Financial Secretary
Jaymie Taft Attendance Secretary
Terry Powell Registrar
Shauna Lavender Hall Monitor
Shellie Adderley Assistant, Special Education
Susan Carr Assistant, Main Office
Shirley Coleman Assistant, Main Office
Jennifer Cornaby Assistant, ESL
Nannette Empey Assistant, Copy Room
Kim Hyde Assistant, ISS
Marion Minson Assistant, Attendance
Kathy Shapiro Assistant, ISS
Karen Terry Assistant, Media Center
Ruth Tripp Assistant, Counseling Center
Orley Bills Head Custodian
Jeff Welch Lead Custodian
Dennis Watkins Custodian
Lawrence Velarde Custodian
Linda Taft Food Services Manager
Angie Lavery Food Services, Clerk
Teri Cedarholm Food Services
Bonnie Feroah Food Services
Jeanne Forsman Food Services, Clerk

Judy Harding.....	Food Services
Penny Orton.....	Food Services
Barbara Pestana.....	Food Services
Joanne Ray.....	Food Services
Sandra Steinfeldt.....	Food Services
Vickie Whicker.....	Food Services
Faye Decol.....	Food Services, Cashier
Dianne Duckworth.....	Food Services, Cashier
Misty Hatch.....	Food Services, Cashier
Roxanne Saltas.....	Food Services, Cashier

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Angela Beatty	Carvel Jonas	John Schneggenburger
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Terri Cook	John McNeill	Kent Smith
Tiffany Cooke	Donna Mickelsen	James Snarr
Angela Dugdale	Alisan Mills	Paula Snyder
Emily Emery	Louise Monroe	Julie Sorenson
Kaylene Esplin	Victor Neves	Richard Statler
Vickie Fuller	Jerilynn Packer	Carole Thatcher
Shelly Hacker	Amy Park	Camille Thomas
Audrey Haight	Cherie Patterson	Deanna Todd
Travis Hamblin	Kathleen Paul	Randy Tree
Heather Harkness	Jorjann Peters	Lisa Vandevaegeaete
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Patricia Hendricks	Teresa Rex	Paula Williams
Teresa Hirschi	Gail Richardson	James Yearsley
Brandy Johnson	Robert Robertson	Travis Young

WEST HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of West Hills Middle School, in partnership with students, educators, families, and the community is to promote academic excellence and to create a safe, caring atmosphere in which students aspire to become responsible, functional citizens and life-long learners.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

We believe...

1. All students have the right and ability to learn.
2. Curriculum and modeling can teach moral integrity, ethics, tolerance, and social responsibility.
3. School should provide a safe learning environment which promotes student accountability and fosters academic achievement.
4. School can foster life-long learning and promote productive citizenship.
5. Students learn best in an environment that is both nurturing and rigorous.
6. Educating a child is a community effort; we must combine our resources to create academic excellence.
7. Teacher should use developmentally responsive teaching strategies.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Lori B. Gardner, Hunter Junior High School, Granite School District,
Team Chairperson

Vickie Bingham, Davis School District

Mary Lane, Bonneville Junior High School, Granite School District

Tina Ploch, Kearns Junior High School, Granite School District

Lisa Tonge, Bonneville Junior High School, Granite School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

WEST HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

West Hills Middle School was opened as a new school to serve the West Jordan and Copperton communities in 1998, with a student population of 641 in grades 7-9. The school serves a largely stable working/middle class community. Due to rapid development in the area, the school's population has grown significantly. The current population is 1,447 and the school is anticipating a boundary change as Jordan District is planning for a new middle school within the area to alleviate overcrowding.

Catherine Jensen became the principal of the school in 2001. The two assistant principals have had one and two years of experience in the school. The faculty consists of 56 teachers and three counselors. Since 2000, the faculty has been actively pursuing middle level implementation. Teaming is evident, and is evolving. Language arts and social studies teachers spend considerable time and effort to map and integrate their curricula. In accordance with middle level philosophy, the staff and faculty have focused on creating a school culture that is responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

The profile validated perceptions that certain groups of students were not achieving academic success. In particular, minority students, impoverished students, and disabled students were not gaining academic proficiency commensurate with the rest of the student population. Since the numbers of students in these subgroups have increased, considerable attention is now being given to determinant factors.

CRT data indicated significant progress made in language arts. Science scores remained constant, with a considerable majority of students on grade level. CRT math scores indicate a clear and pressing need to increase the number of students who are performing at or above grade level.

Survey data summarized in the profile indicates satisfaction with school programs and policies among teachers, parents, and students. Responses by teachers and parents were closely aligned, and, while student information was generally positive, the data provided the faculty, staff, and administration with clear areas for improvement. Efforts to create a safe, friendly, and positive environment have resulted in fewer administrative referrals; however, information regarding tardies and truancy warrants attention.

- b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

The efforts of the staff to disaggregate data are commendable. The district and state are presently working to provide additional data in a timely fashion for all schools. The school should continue to monitor the academic achievement of academically struggling students. As the school proceeds with its action plan, information regarding instructional practice and program effectiveness should be included within the profile as part of the documentation.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- It is recommended that additional data be gathered to identify students with deficient credits for graduation, correlate attendance with school success, and evaluate current disciplinary practice.
- The staff should consider participating in an examination of the data within each department. This should include a study of instructional and assessment strategies employed, grading standards, and the application of the desired results for Student Learning. This would allow each department and teacher to identify performance goals and standards.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The “Collaborating for Student Achievement” accreditation process began with the training of a leadership team in 1999 under the direction of then-principal Dr. Kerrie Naylor. When Mrs. Jensen became principal in 2001, a yearlong hiatus in the process was taken to allow Mrs. Jensen time to become acculturated to the school. During that time extensive professional development on middle level philosophy and practice was provided, and collaboration on the school’s mission and beliefs continued. In 2002, Mrs. Jensen invited teachers and parents to serve on an Accreditation Leadership Committee. The faculty, staff, and parents reviewed the mission statement and revised the belief statements.

In the fall of 2002, focus groups with teacher, staff, and parent participation were formed and met regularly for the next 18 months. The faculty, with parent participation, developed the DRSLs, and departments began their self-studies. Data was collected for the school profile, and surveys were distributed to teachers, parents, and students. Students were invited to provide feedback on the DRSLs.

The Visiting Team commends the dedication and commitment of teachers, administrators, and parents to the accreditation process. Countless unpaid hours have been spent in committee work. The involvement of parents was encouraged and vital to the work. Due to the efforts of the school community, the self-study is a congruent, focused document that will drive the school's actions.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

West Hills Middle School's self-study is a comprehensive survey of the work of teachers and its impact on student success. It is an honest look at what is currently effective and what needs to be considered for change. It is apparent that aspects of the self-study (i.e., mission, beliefs, departmental analysis, and focus group reports) are the result of extensive study and discussion. The Visiting Team found that the report accurately portrayed the effort given to the accreditation process, as well as efforts on behalf of students.

The self-study does not delve deep enough into issues of instructional effectiveness and overall student performance and behavior. It fails to give a clear picture of those that might be "falling through the cracks." Upon discussion with teachers and administrators, it is apparent that they know of the gaps in their understanding and knowledge and that work is underway to gain additional information. It is recommended that the self-study be reviewed and amended as additional information becomes available.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

West Hills Middle School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

1. Students will be critical thinkers and problem solvers.
2. Students will communicate effectively through reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
3. Students will demonstrate positive character development
4. Students will exhibit skills that lead to responsible citizenship.
5. Students will demonstrate basic knowledge and learn individual skills that support future learning.
6. Students will develop skills to work effectively with others.

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

Consensus for the school's mission statement, shared vision, beliefs, and goals was achieved through meetings of parent groups, faculty and staff discussion, and meetings with administration. The Visiting Team found evidence of a collaborative effort to arrive at consensus that involved all stakeholders.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

The school has defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration, faculty, and staff to support student achievement. The belief statements reflect the school's dedication to appropriate education for young adolescents. The belief statements provide the foundation for collaboration and program development.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The school's DRSLs (i.e., developing critical thinkers, effective communicators, positive character, responsible citizenship, lifelong learning, and the skill to work effectively with others) are closely aligned to the school's mission and belief statements. It is clear that the mission and belief statements drove the selection and articulation of the school's desired results for student learning.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The Visiting Team found strong evidence that the curriculum is clearly defined and aligned with both the district standards and the State Core, as well as having vertical alignment within some departments. There are commendable efforts within the departments to create time to work collaboratively to identify and solve curriculum issues. For example, the math department held a two-day meeting to map their curriculum based on the State Core. English teachers meet on an ongoing basis to assure curriculum alignment. The faculty recognizes the need to move to the next step and is prepared to integrate their curricula.

The Visiting Team found evidence of inclusion of the Utah Life Skills in the development of the DRSLs and as part of the curriculum used in Teacher Advisory classes. It is recommended that the school's DRSLs be published and posted in each classroom and in prominent positions throughout the school building to facilitate the implementation of these skills.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

West Hills Middle School has a clear of focus on what it is trying to accomplish. A survey presented to students and teachers identified adjustments that needed to be made to assure they were developing curricula focused on the school's desired results for student learning. The DRSLs are the center of all group meetings. The faculty feels that the learning process is influenced by the knowledge and experience base of the teachers. Therefore, they are fully invested as participants in the continuous learning process and the ongoing practice of evaluating the curriculum and instructional methods used. The faculty's sincere commitment to providing quality programs is evident as they work collaboratively to promote student success.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

The Visiting Team commends the degree to which the faculty and administration of West Hills Middle School are highly dedicated to the education of all students.

Real learning happens when students are physically engaged and find purpose in the material being taught. A variety of teaching strategies were observed in many of the classrooms, including cooperative learning groups, "think pair-shares," hands-on learning, in-class demonstrations and discussions, mapping, teacher modeling, and many other techniques.

The Visiting Team learned through student interviews that the students appreciate teachers who use multiple and varied teaching strategies. It is impressive to note that, due to the strength of the professional learning culture of the school, teachers at West Hills Middle School are willing to take risks as they implement new teaching strategies to help meet the academic needs of all students.

The Visiting Team recommends that this faculty continue the investigation of best practices that will help further student achievement.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

Administrators and teachers demonstrate a commitment to providing a curriculum that is relevant and engaging. The faculty has engaged in the study of brain research and diverse learning styles. With this as a foundation, many teachers have also studied and implemented layered curriculum to provide differentiation. Through observation and interviews, it was apparent to the Visiting Team that teachers use a variety of strategies to engage students and reinforce learning. Since most classes are heterogeneous, teachers construct learning activities that foster student success and meaningful learning while addressing their students' diverse needs.

The Visiting Team observed a commitment to providing quality educational experiences for learning disabled and limited English proficient students. Teachers work closely with one another to align curricula with Core standards and provide accommodations where needed. The Visiting Team observed teachers teaming across grade and subject areas. Resource students participate in Core Curricular classes that are co-taught with special education teachers. One-third of the teaching staff is ESL endorsed, and all teachers have participated in REACH and Sheltered English Strategies workshops.

While there is no gifted program at West Hills Middle School, honors courses are offered in English, math, and science to meet the needs of students. Students are also provided with many co-curricular activities through which they can develop skills and talents.

The Instructional Design Focus Group held nine formal meetings, as well as many informal meetings via e-mail, memos, and personal discussions. Based on the results of a teacher survey, future inservices on differentiated learning strategies will be provided. The committee is enthusiastically working to develop the workshops.

The Visiting Team encourages the administration, guidance counselors, and teachers to continue their focus on making all academic lessons meaningful, and to focus on the diverse needs of students. Teachers will be able to more effectively address the educational needs of all students when there is time for collaboration through common consultations, with additional time built into the school schedule for that purpose. The Visiting Team acknowledges the extreme amount of progress made by the West Hills Middle School faculty toward the implementation of the middle school model.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

West Hills Middle School teachers are dedicated professionals. Efforts are made to provide additional opportunities that support student learning through after-school programs. The teachers are also highly motivated to participate in professional learning to develop effective teaching strategies, often on their own time and without remuneration.

The counselors have implemented study skills classes, which provide tutoring after school for those who are in jeopardy of failing. Computer labs are also open after school for student use. Students can make up missed work in the Homework Clubs held by departments and individual teachers after school.

Formal homework assistance is not offered in the morning before school. Due to the fact that roughly 80 percent of the students ride buses, access to labs, Homework Clubs, and tutoring programs is limited. Some students expressed frustration with not being able to receive additional help due to transportation issues, particularly in the afternoon. The Visiting Team recommends that the school consider longer hours for the media center and computer labs, and provide tutoring before school and during lunch to accommodate the needs of students who cannot stay after school. The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty and administration evaluate the after-school support programs to assess whether they are meeting the needs of students, and determine which students are able to take advantage of these support programs.

The Visiting Team also encourages the faculty to explore options within the current schedule for providing greater support for those students experiencing academic difficulty. Students and teachers commented about the value of the Teacher Advisory period. The original intent of the class was to provide homework support and teach study skills. Currently, the class also provides character education. However, according to student and parent comments, time is often wasted. The Visiting Team found the Teacher Assisted period to be a valuable component of the school's schedule; however, it is recommended that teachers formalize the structure so that students clearly perceive the time to be of value.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or schoolwide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

Classroom observations and teacher interviews indicate that individual teachers are creating various assessments in order to evaluate their own classroom expectations. There is little evidence of schoolwide or departmental standards governing the development of classroom assessment tools, other than making state Criterion-Referenced Tests the guide for expected content mastery. The West Hills Middle School staff is aware of the need for such assessments, and is

developing a plan based on the expectations for student achievement. Their goal is to close the achievement gap for ethnic minorities, at-risk students, ESL students, and low socioeconomic students. The Visiting Team recommends the continuation of their efforts to develop schoolwide assessments.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

There are many indications that the assessments being applied in most classrooms consistently utilize methods based on the type of learning to be assessed, along with performance standards. For example, the Reading and Math Departments implement authentic assessments based upon a clear definition of the achievement to be evaluated. The state and district standardized assessments, which are the basis of West Hills Middle's assessment system, are not directly linked to specific instructional strategies that promote students achievement. The unreliability of this scoring, as well as the lack of timely availability of these results, makes the use of the data challenging. Currently, CRT results are used as a tool for program placement.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

The Visiting Team found several teachers who give as many as four different formats of the same tests in one class to accommodate student needs. One of the goals in the West Hills Middle School's action plan is to develop teaching activities and assessments for each DRSL. The faculty is aware of the need to assess different levels of specific performance standards when evaluating student achievement. The Visiting Team recommends the continued study and implementation of fair and equitable assessments.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The staff at West Hills Middle School clearly has student success as its priority. It has worked diligently to promote student achievement through the implementation of various programs that facilitate an investment in learning. Some of the programs include BUG (Bring Up Grades) Club, 4.0 Club, Honor Roll, CATS (Character, Academics, Talent, Service) Program, Wildcat of the Quarter, 7-Up Club (all Hs in citizenship), Student of the Day, Burgundy and Blue Club (perfect attendance), Random Act of Kindness tickets, Good Student and Good Class referrals, and No Tardy Parties.

The administration has done an admirable job of creating and supporting an environment that concentrates on student learning. The faculty is committed to centering practice on student achievement. The Visiting Team observed the use of a variety of instructional strategies that demonstrated the staff's focus on the learning process.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

The decision-making process at West Hills Middle School is collaborative and provides opportunities for the meaningful involvement of the school's stakeholders. The Visiting Team found that school decisions are consistent with the school's mission and with the overriding intent to do what is best for the students. All faculty members, and many of the staff, participate in focus groups, as well as departmental and faculty meetings, on a regular basis. Referral statistics and other pertinent data are used to determine areas for improvement. The staff recognizes the need to focus on gathering and maintaining more student achievement data, which will help inform the decision-making efforts.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

The achievement of all students has become a major focus for the school. Teachers realize the need for better forms of assessment to evaluate student achievement. Currently, students and teachers confer about grades during Teacher Advisory time. Several times during the quarter, the Teacher Advisory teacher meets with an individual student to review current grades and missing assignments in all classes.

The faculty has been introduced to the RESULTS process and will begin training in the method of using student work to assess teacher effectiveness this spring. This will assist the faculty in developing effective ways of evaluating student progress. Those teachers whose curricula are subject to CRT scores use the data to monitor their own effectiveness in teaching the State Core standards. Teachers have become aware that they need to better understand how to use assessment to monitor student progress. The faculty and administration will be implementing a data-driven decision-making model that will contribute to their school improvement efforts.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

West Hills Middle School clearly demonstrates strong leadership in providing a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. School rules are visible in the

building and available to stakeholders through such means as the student planners and common TA lessons, announcements presented during TA time, and the school's website. Students express that they feel safe at school. Students feel that they can go to the administration or TA teachers to discuss any concerns they have, and that they have advocates in the school. The faculty feels empowered to have input in decision making, and that the administration fosters a climate of cooperation and collaboration.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSs, and school improvement efforts?*

The West Hills Middle School leadership's focus is the achievement of the school's goals. This year a major project was aligning the CSIP (the school's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, required by the district) with the school's mission, DRSs, and action plan. This alignment will serve to ensure resource allocations are maximized for student achievement. The open communication between faculty and leadership, combined with the diligent focus on student success, will work to guarantee that improvement efforts continue.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The leadership is open to any suggestions and ideas stakeholders might present. It is clearly communicated to stakeholders that their input and participation are important to the success of the school. It is obvious that student success is a shared responsibility for all stakeholders. One line of evidence is that the focus groups that were originally structured for the accreditation process will evolve into standing committees given the charge of ensuring the implementation of the action plan.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The Visiting Team was impressed by the strong sense of community and collaboration that exists among the staff. West Hills Middle School is dedicated to promoting positive and productive relationships among students, teachers, support staff, and administrators. The staff shows great sensitivity to the developmental needs of the students, and is committed to the middle level philosophy of teaming and collaboration. For example, they have implemented grade level teams in the language arts and social studies classes. The staff is also working on making more cross-curricular connections in other content areas

through curriculum mapping. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff continue its collaborative efforts across departments to provide more cross-curricular connections for students. The Visiting Team also recommends that adequate time be built into the master schedule for the purpose of team collaboration.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The staff reaches out to parents and families to engage them as partners in the learning process through a variety of programs: Community Council, PTSA, SEOPs, Career Fairs, Reality Town, PowerSchool, student-led conferences, and involvement in school focus groups. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff continue its efforts to involve more parents in volunteer and decision-making efforts in the school.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

West Hills Middle School clearly has made professional development a priority. Over 40 hours of professional development were held on site during the 2002-2003 year, and the principal is supportive of teachers engaging in professional learning outside of school. Each action step of the school's plan addresses the need for, and commitment to, continued professional growth.

The administration sent out a needs assessment and, based on its return, provided a menu of options for professional learning. Teachers have had the opportunity to attend conferences and participate in the USOE Teacher Academy, vertical teaming, technology training, and departmental curriculum development. Teacher development is an integral part of the school culture and is articulated throughout the school's action plan.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

It is obvious that the administration values and cultivates input from students, parents, and staff. Parents believe that their concerns are addressed and that they have access to information and opportunities to be involved in the school. Students feel that the adults in the building are truly concerned about their welfare and best interests. Teachers and administrators are developing ways to ensure that students feel that they have a voice in decision making. Teachers are encouraged in many ways to engage in professional learning and dialogue. The

administration is very supportive of conferences and opportunities for professional growth, and the degree to which teachers regularly talk about and share best practices is very high.

The Visiting Team was impressed with the degree to which teachers were engaged in ongoing professional learning, and with their dedication to school improvement. The school has clearly adopted a culture of continuous improvement.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

This section does not apply to middle and junior high schools. Most middle and junior high schools do not belong to NAAS.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the schoolwide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The Visiting Team commends West Hills Middle School for developing an action plan which clearly addresses the critical needs defined through the self-study, and which is focused on the DRSLs. The plan is well thought out and provides a clear guide to future program development and implementation.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, schoolwide and systemwide?*

The plan has been developed through the collaboration of all stakeholders. It provides an easy framework within which all efforts directed toward student achievement can commence. The action steps define ways in which teachers, staff, administrators, and district leaders will be held accountable for teaching and learning. The Visiting Team found strong commitment to the action plan on the part of teachers and administrators.

- c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school wide action plan appear to be?*

The school's action plan defines forms of assessment for each action step, most of which (such as grades, attendance and standardized testing information) are provided through district and state data banks. The faculty and administration are

excited to begin a process of continuously using assessment to facilitate powerful teaching and learning. It is expected that as they become more adept and invested in this process, they will move from using data provided by state and district means to examining student work as a means of measuring effectiveness.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the faculty, staff, and administration of West Hills Middle School for engaging in a thorough self-study process. The process allowed for teacher, staff, parent, and student input and clearly identified school strengths and weaknesses.
- The Visiting Team commends the staff for its commitment to continuous improvement. Mrs. Jensen and the administration are to be commended for the degree to which they have worked to empower stakeholders to be decision-makers. The faculty and staff are commended for their dedication to professionalism and for creating a culture where professionalism and the implementation of best practice are the norm.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration and staff for the tremendous job they have done in aligning needs, goals, and objectives. The school has a clear and focused vision for student success that is clearly understood and supported by all stakeholders.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration, staff, and faculty for their commitment to programs and practices that are responsive to the needs of young adolescents.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to use multiple forms of data to identify gaps in student achievement. This should include a thorough examination of effective instructional practices and their use and implementation by the faculty.
- The Visiting Team recommends the continued study and implementation of middle level best practices. While teachers have been effectively working with one another in “teams,” team configuration needs to be expanded to directly affect students through the creation of heterogeneous, smaller learning communities.

- The Visiting Team strongly recommends the incorporation of regular time for collaboration. On the school level, this means the creation of a schedule that provides time for teachers on teams to regularly plan together. As this pertains to the school calendar, it is recommended that district leaders support the collaborative and continuous learning efforts of West Hills Middle School through the inclusion of a weekly early release time for whole faculty study and collaboration. While the school's staff has devoted hundreds of unpaid hours to the effort of school improvement, it should not be expected that such dedication will continue without compensation.